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The Detrimental Effects of Organized Religion on Women in Lee
Smith's Fiction

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
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In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Jennifer Renee Collins

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ABSTRACT

The Detrimental Effects of Organized Religion on Women in Lee Smith's Fiction

by

Jennifer Renee Collins

This study examines the detrimental effects of religion on characters in Smith's fiction, with special attention to three general areas of religious influence on women. It considers Smith's illumination of the social, psychological, and artistic harm that organized religion can inflict on the lives of women.

This study includes library research of religion and Lee Smith's fiction. The study also concludes that Smith's seemingly casual fiction raises unsettling questions about the negative effects that religion often has on individuals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lee Smith is a self-proclaimed story teller, and on the surface her novels do seem to be mere stories, lighthearted and chatty. However, closer attention to these "stories" shows a writer dealing with many complex and often dark issues. Smith pays special attention to the development of women and the forces that shape them. One of the strongest influences on female development in Smith's novels is the organized system of Christian beliefs.

Smith explores many of her own religious questions and doubts through the women in her novels. Three of the novels that Smith uses for her exploration are Fair and Tender Ladies (1988), The Devil's Dream (1992), and Saving Grace (1995). Although each novel deals with many of the dangers organized religion presents to women, each one also has a specific focus. Fair and Tender Ladies looks particularly at social damage, The Devil's Dream pays attention to the damage done to female creativity and artistic talents, and Saving Grace notices the harsh emotional and physical damage that women can face at the hands of organized religion. This study shows that the depth of Smith's exploration

increases with each novel, and the latest novel reveals the most serious and damaging results.

According to William Sadler, social scientists have long recognized that it is nearly impossible to study an individual without considering the effect that religion has had on that person's development: "No psychology can claim to have achieved a whole picture of personality unless it considers religion and those personal phenomena which often play an important role in it" (Sadler 3). This observation is true for both Lee Smith and the characters she creates. According to "In Her Own Words," an article on her web site, Smith's earliest fiction, a story written when she was nine years old, has Adlai Stevenson and Jane Russell going west in a covered wagon to become Mormons (1). Since then we find religion in almost every Lee Smith story.

Fred Hobson, a prominent critic of Southern writers, asserts that any discussion or criticism of a Southern writer will include certain characteristics that are difficult for Southern writers to avoid (3). According to Hobson, religion is one of the characteristics, and Smith's fiction is no exception. In particular, Smith recognizes the disappointment that organized religion can bring to the lives of women. Smith's characters turn to religion hoping for meaning, identity, and security. Most of these women find only guilt, fear, and dependency.

According to Freud, organized religion could be detrimental

to a person's individuality. Freud's work suggests that religion originates from a sense of helplessness and fear. Freud did not consider religion to be a productive element in the formation of perception; he suggested that religion interfered with perception by fostering a mental projection of fears, repressed wishes, and guilt feelings upon phenomena that are in no way responsible for them. From Freud's psychoanalytic approach, religion could, at least in some individuals, be understood as part of an elaborate system of defense designed to keep the personality secure at the expense of honesty and creative development (Freud 31).

In these three Smith novels we see that patriarchal religion and the family unit are closely bound. Consequently, organized religion begins its influence very early in the lives of women. Religion and family are tied so closely together in the South that it is nearly impossible to study the effects of religion on one's development without also looking at the effects of family. This close association is supported in Anne Horton's book Abuse and Religion: "Religion is another important institution of American society. It is so closely affiliated with the family that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two institutions" (1).

Mary Daly, a feminist theologian, discusses the process that has given strength to the popular patriarchal style of organized religion:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. [. . .] If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. (13)

Our patriarchal society makes women more vulnerable to the goals of religion because they have less chance in other areas of their lives to experience meaning, identity, and security. In her fiction, Smith explores the ways that these precious intangibles are perverted by patriarchal organized religion to the detriment of women.

Each of these novels raises disturbing questions about the potential for religion to damage women. Numerous female characters are defined, damaged, and even destroyed by their beliefs in a patriarchal religious system. In some cases, women perpetuate their own subordination because they are unwilling to recognize and confront the attitudes that bind them. One social scientist recognizes the difficulty in ending the subordination of women:

The religious battered woman must come to see reality--that religion has been part of her

problem and that true mental and emotional health can come about only when she can reject her religious dependency sufficiently to recognize a fact: that the degradation of women is a cornerstone of most religions. (Horton 235)

A wide range of critics, including Lucinda MacKethan, Dorothy Combs Hill, Ann Goodwyn Jones, and Corrine Dale have studied many elements of Smith's writing. Her content and style have caused her to be compared to other great Southern writers such as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Alice Walker. A large amount of Smith criticism deals with the female search for meaning and identity. However, these critics have given little attention to the effect that religion has had on these women.

Lucinda H. MacKethan gives attention to the technical and imaginative balance of Smith's work:

Not only do her works concern thematically the problem of choosing between or balancing the ordinary and the mysterious, the earthy and the ethereal, but technically, too, the stories and novels [. . .] strike a balance of effects, particularly in their choices of tone, point of view, and texture. (3)

MacKethan pays attention to the difficult situations of Smith's women and the choices they make, but she does not pay serious

attention to the effect that religion has had on these women's decisions, nor to the extent that religion is responsible for the situations they face.

Ann Goodwyn Jones recognizes and addresses the difficult situation of women in Smith's works but without regard to religion: "Lee Smith is exact and devastating in her portrayals of women, usually married, caught in a cycle of guilt, self-deprecation, entrapment, rebellion, and again guilt that screens them from themselves" (120). The principal goal of Ann Goodwyn Jones's critical work is to trace the development of the Smith's technical achievements, particularly her narrative techniques.

Katherine Kearns pays attention to the thematic parallels among Smith's books, specifically the conflict between the artist and mother figure. Kearns asserts that in Smith's novels, particularly The Devil's Dream, we see this conflict not only in female artists who are confused about their roles as mothers, but also in female artists in conflict with their own mothers. Kearns associates Smith's personal struggles with those of her characters: "Smith's changing attitude toward herself as a writer is the clue to her fiction, which has explored all the ways that women search for identity" (314).

Dorothy Combs Hill looks at the process of female development in Smith's fiction. Perhaps more than any other critic, Hill deals with the religious aspect of Smith's work. In

her study of the development of the female, she recognizes the detrimental effects that Smith feels religion has had on women, especially in the South: "Smith explores religion as one avenue for wholeness, but the religion available to her characters is so corrupted that it offers nothing but hollowness and cynicism" (128). Hill explores the heart of Smith's work: "She is trying to imagine the flesh as inspired, as filled with spirit, as alive because of spirit, and as dead if spirit is locked out by the convention of scientific rationalism and rigid social codes that disallow or deny female spirituality, vitality, creativity, originality, expression, sexuality" (128).

In Smith's early novels, women are unable to establish an identity outside the one assigned to them by society and religion. Individuality is discouraged by family, society, and religious traditions. Elizabeth Broadwell summarizes this situation in her essay on Smith:

In each novel, the protagonist tries but fails to find meaning in inherited religion or in the past [. . .]. Smith creates protagonists who are progressively older and whose initiation becomes increasingly experiential and more devastating. Finding in their Southern environment only circumscribed social images and codes of behavior

rather than encouragement toward self definition.

(424)

Organized religion offers the individual a chance to belong to a group, and members of groups derive a part of their personality from the group. This sense of belonging is important in our society. Organized religious systems are some of the largest and strongest groups in the world, and according to Sadler's Personality and Religion, quite influential in terms of altering one's personality. Daly explains how religion and society rely on each other for definition:

The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and "Articles of Faith," and these in turn justify the social structures which have been projected into the realm of dogmas and which sustain their plausibility. The belief system becomes hardened and objectified, seeming to have an unchangeable independent existence and validity of its own. (13)

The rigid standards of behavior that come with most forms of Christianity may prevent individuals from exploring their doubts and questions. Christianity teaches that sinners and doubters will be punished in hell. Members of the church are often afraid to question the practices and beliefs of the church for fear that their questioning will be construed as disobedience or disbelief,

and they will be dismissed from the group. Milton Rokeach points to this danger of organized religion in his essay "Paradoxes of Religious Belief":

One's religion may be felt to provide stability and comfort; but further examination might indicate that this same religion is also a security system which effectively prevents a person from discovering and realizing the most significant possibilities of human existence. (226)

Besides expulsion from the group, individuals are afraid to question and explore their faith because they are afraid that they might really slip into the abyss of uncertainty and end up in hell. Consequently, individuality is often sacrificed for security.

In Smith's early works we do not see women who are able to survive these stipulations. Susan Tobey, from The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed, creates an imaginative kingdom for herself and her family when she cannot face reality. Brooke Kincaid, from Something in the Wind, becomes two people in her mind in order to deal with her world. Crystal Spangler, from Black Mountain Breakdown, ends up in a catatonic state because of her inability to deal with her world. The women in Fancy Strut, Family Linen, and Oral History are only slightly more able to deal with their worlds, which are largely shaped by the values of organized

religion. Most of these women are not able to save themselves from social pressure and the dangers of organized religion as the protagonists of the other three novels mentioned are able to do. In the three novels of this paper, however, Smith's women are able to deal with their fates largely because they are able to come to terms with religion.

Hill's book notes the change in Smith's fictional women: "With Fair and Tender Ladies we come to the fulfillment of our long exploration of the problem of female development in Smith's fiction. Ivy Rowe [. . .] embodies female victory over the social forces, externally inflicted and internally realized, that would destroy her" (109). Until Ivy Rowe, the protagonist in Fair and Tender Ladies, Smith's women were largely unable to break the cycle of guilt and depression they experienced as a result of their religiously assigned roles.

Smith's novels show that organized religion has generally recognized women only as extensions of men, specifically their husbands. In our society, where women are much more liberated than in many other societies, women have had to fight for the right to own property, for the right to vote, even for the right to make decisions about their own bodies. Horton's book, Abuse and Religion, recognizes the seriousness of the church's role in the subordination of women: "The clergy preaches a male-oriented theology and structure of the marriage relationship [...] its

attitudes about woman's place, duty, and nature have added to the problem" (4). Horton reminds readers that the subordination of women has been maintained for centuries with the help of religion:

Early laws of marriage came from Rome, where the man was the absolute patriarch who owned and controlled all properties and people within the family. As Roman laws began to modify subordination, a new religious group called Christians gained converts and power, and demanded the continuance and maintenance of the control and authority to the patriarchy [. . .]. (7)

Smith recognizes how detrimental religion has been in the lives of many women, and she explores these detriments through various female characters.

The same religious and societal forces are present in Fair and Tender Ladies as were present in Smith's earlier novels. However, Ivy is the first female strong enough to stand up against these forces and not be destroyed by them or by her own guilt and sadness. Ivy faces many of the challenges that Smith's other women have faced. Her chance to use her creative and artistic gifts is destroyed when the conduct codes, established by the church, are vigorously enforced by society. Ivy's desires to learn, to be a writer, to be a teacher, and to travel are all

thwarted. A pregnancy, before she is wed, causes Ivy to lose the chance to fulfill her dreams. Ivy is considered by society and by herself to be "ruined" (164). In spite of, or maybe because of being ruined, Ivy lives her life with more freedom than female characters in earlier Smith novels. She does not shrink when her society and family frown on her, and she is able to live with the decisions she makes. In this novel, Smith probes deeper into religion than she has in her earlier works, allowing a female character to embark on an inner-directed search for meaning. Ivy is one of the earliest Smith women who has the strength to question the values of the religious structure, reject the prescribed behaviors for women, explore their individuality, and come away intact.

Through Ivy's sister-in-law, Dreema Fox, of Fair and Tender Ladies, Smith presents an image of the devout Christian woman stripped of individualism. Although Dreema is obedient and devoted, she is also rigid and mechanical in her observance of religion. Travis Word's sisters from Saving Grace and Katie's mother from The Devil's Dream are also victims of the mob mentality of organized religion. They are obedient followers, smug in their religion. They accept the rituals, behaviors, and prejudices of organized religion and find social and personal security in the structure the church.

Miss Torrington is a lesbian missionary in Fair and Tender Ladies who faces shame and guilt because of the church's attitude toward her sexual orientation. Through Miss Torrington, Smith reveals one of the strong prejudices of Christianity. There are many cases of religious guilt associated with sexuality in Smith's works. Many of the women are condemned by the church and consequently by society for what is considered their sexual deviance or misconduct. The unwillingness of many organized religions to accept variation regarding events and behaviors found in society drastically restricts the potential for the discovery of truth and meaning.

Smith shows that organized religion's degradation of women, homosexuals, blacks, and other groups reflects the prejudiced nature of the system. Although Christianity and other religions claim support for the Golden Rule, they have supported, and continue to support, a number of prejudices, as Smith reveals. Besides contradicting the teaching that Christians should love one another unconditionally, these prejudices also rob members of choice. Belonging to a religious group often requires maintenance of the group's prejudices. There is plenty of support for Smith's idea that organized religion can be dangerous to individuals. Sadler found that people claiming to be religious were often less forgiving than non-religious people:

I have found that, on the average, those who identify themselves as belonging to a religious organization express more intolerance [. . .] church goers and professedly religious people have considerably more prejudice than do non-church goers and non-believers.
(227)

Smith's depiction of Reverend Virgil Shepherd in Saving Grace captures a cruel prejudice. Virgil has a strong reaction to Grace's staying with a family that he did not consider worthy: "'I never knowed you was staying over here among nigger lovers,' Daddy said. 'I'm just as sorry about it as I can be'" (Saving Grace 137). In his book Serpent Handling Believers, Thomas Burton quotes a preacher who strongly believes that some sins are more serious than others: "The worse sin you can commit is homosexuality" (97). Treating homosexuality as a sin makes it easier for the believer to maintain a prejudice.

The Devil's Dream sheds additional light on the unfortunate circumstances of women in organized religion. This novel pays special attention to creative women who have their talents stifled by a male-dominant society, the strict code of behavior assigned to them by religion, and by their own fear and guilt. In this novel, Smith explores the devastation of this artistic stifling and searches for alternatives for her female characters. Smith recognizes the destruction of personal identity and the

stifling of ideas as some of the most frightening elements of organized religion.

Katie Cocker battles religious guilt as she pursues her dreams of being a singer. Kate Malone is forced to hide her fiddle talent because of the religious dictatorship of her husband, Moses. Her husband's religious zeal is responsible for the death of one of their children and dramatically affects the mental health of the others. Eventually, Kate herself is destroyed by her guilt and sadness.

Twenty-seven years after Smith's first novel was published, she published the novel Saving Grace in 1995. The religious questions that Smith raises in this novel are questions that would likely have been threatening to her both personally and professionally early in her career. By 1995, Smith had gained the confidence to write a novel that questioned the sacred and social roles imposed on women by organized religion. Hill notes the development of Smith's writing as her career progressed: "Smith wrote her way through patriarchy to get to a sacred-sexual imaging of the female" (Lee Smith 80).

Saving Grace focuses especially on the psychological damage done to women who are at the mercy of a patriarchal organized religion. Grace's sisters Evelyn and Billie Jean are both victims of organized religion. Evelyn is physically abused and emotionally manipulated before she finally escapes the bonds of

their father's religion. Billie Jean's fragile mental well being is shattered by the confusion and violence of the same religion. Grace's mother, Fannie Flowers, takes her own life because of her guilt and fear, and Grace herself faces emotional abuse, abandonment, and confusion as she deals with organized religion. Grace is psychologically abused and manipulated as a child, and later, in her married life, she experiences tremendous guilt and shame because of her religious background.

In Saving Grace, Smith shows that patriarchal religion is not only primarily responsible for the subordination of women, it can also be blamed for some part of the mistreatment of Grace and her siblings when they are children. The abuse that begins in Grace's childhood carries into her young adult life and has a devastating effect on her adult life. Physical abuse of children in some religious households is excused by the popular phrase, "Spare the rod, spoil the child," derived from Proverbs 13:24. Fear is a method of control for parents and anyone trying to maintain superior status. Smith uses Grace and her sisters to show the potential abuse that children face because of organized religion.

Grace and her siblings are certainly victims of various forms of child abuse. Neglect, abandonment, and mental suffering are all elements of the psychological abuse that Grace and her siblings face. The definition of neglect and abandonment given

below by the California Department of Social Services is a near exact description of the treatment Grace received from her parents as they zealously followed the will of God:

Neglect: failure to exercise the degree of care a reasonable person would exercise. Neglect includes, but is not limited to, the failure to assist in personal hygiene, provide food and clothing, provide medical care for physical and mental health needs, protect from health and safety hazards, and prevent malnutrition.

Abandonment: unreasonably deserting or willfully forsaking [. . .]. Mental suffering: deliberately causing fear, agitation, confusion, severe depression [. . .]. (Horton 30)

The fifth commandment instructs children to honor their parents, and traditional Judeo-Christian teachings have instructed them to love and obey their parents. Therefore, as Horton points out, children who want to stop the abuse begin to question their own self-worth. They feel that rebelling against their parents is rebelling against the church and God (151). Smith brings this confusion to light and shows the effects that it has on these girls as they become adults.

These three novels show how religion can change the social, psychological, emotional, and artistic lives of women. In her

female characters we see the rejection, helplessness, fear, repression of individuality, and guilt referred to by Freud. Unlike Freud, who did not consider religion to be a productive element in the formation of perception, Smith strives for religious answers, answers that would bring peace, security, and meaning to the lives of women. The characters who are able to maintain their individuality and come closest to peace are the ones who are able to develop an individual religion, apart from the rules and rituals created by a patriarchal society. In this way, the women in Lee Smith's novels are able to express their individuality while maintaining balance in their lives.

CHAPTER 2

FAIR AND TENDER LADIES

Fair and Tender Ladies (1988), Lee Smith's fourth novel, deals especially with the social detriments women face because of organized religion. In Fair and Tender Ladies several women have destructive religious encounters. Although Ivy Rowe is Smith's primary vehicle of exploration, she also uses Ivy's mother, Maude; Miss Torrington, a school teacher and missionary; Ruth, Ivy's sister-in-law; and Dreama Fox, another sister-in-law.

Through Ivy's mother, Smith shows that religion can have a strong negative emotional impact on a person's life. Mrs. Rowe feels that she has been rejected by God and by religion. She blames God for her hardships and rejects organized religion. Smith's strongest women are able to establish a personal spirituality; however, Maude is unable to reestablish a spiritual core when she rejects organized religion and is left feeling tortured and empty.

Smith uses Miss Torrington, a Presbyterian missionary and school teacher, to illustrate the control that organized religion has over women with regard to their sexuality. Miss Torrington smothers her homosexual instincts because of the laws of religion and society. She feels guilty, ashamed, and even afraid because

of her homosexuality. Miss Torrington's secret sexuality undermines her self-esteem and her sense of goodness and worth.

Smith uses Ruth, Ivy's sister-in-law, to present an extreme case of physical and emotional abuse in the name of religion. Ruth is mistreated physically and emotionally by her husband, Garnie, who is a successful and compelling traveling preacher.

Through Ivy's sister-in-law, Dreama Fox, Smith shows the loss of individuality and the automatic maintenance of religious prejudices that can often accompany organized religion. Dreama follows the rules of the patriarchal organized religion with a fierce intensity. Smith uses Dreama to illustrate the support given to the organized system of religion, even by women who are hampered by it, and the consequences of that support.

Through Ivy, Smith shows the social damage women face because of organized religion. Ivy rejects many parts of religion and is, consequently, a social outcast. Unlike her mother, Ivy does not wholly reject God. Ivy tries to sort through the trappings of religion to reach the spiritual promise of peace, hope, joy, and truth. Smith shows, through Ivy, that women can develop an individual religious freedom. She also shows the cost of that freedom.

In spite of Ivy's youthful awareness of religion, neither of her parents is religious. Through Ivy's mother, Maude, Smith begins to build an explanation of Ivy's religious attitudes. We

know that Maude was religious and worshipped God in her youth because she teaches Ivy a prayer she learned in Rich Valley.

However, when Maude experiences hardship in her life she rejects God, blaming Him for her troubles. Her husband's illness, which Maude believes is God's fault, begins the erosion of her religious faith. We see Maude's anger toward God and her rejection of religion when she stops her son, Garnie, from praying: "Then he prayed and prayed over Danny but Momma said, Cut it out, Garnie Rowe! I don't know what Jesus ever had to do with usuns anyway. Then Garnie said he wuld pray for Momma too wich made her mad as fire" (74).

When Ivy's father, John Arthur, is sick, and later dying, we see the disregard that Ivy's mother has developed toward religion. Maude is so hurt and disillusioned by religion that she is even unwilling to have prayer at her husband's funeral: "Do you want a prayer Maude, Mister Patterson axed Momma and she said Lord no, Green" (41).

Through Maude, Smith shows how personal and intimate an issue religion is for women. Maude rejects God because he does not turn out to be the protector that she feels has been presented by organized religion.

Even after Maude's self-proclaimed rejection of religion, she searches for spiritual peace and healing. She does not search deliberately, but her wretched spirit drives her. She

roams the rocky cliffs of Pilgrims Knob, and her tortured soul is visible on her face. Smith demonstrates through Maude that though organized religion often does not serve the needs of women, some spiritual belief is necessary. The strongest women in Smith's novels are able to replace organized religion with a purer and more personal spirituality. Maude is unable to find a personal faith and consequently lives a tortured life and dies a shell of a woman.

Another woman whom Smith uses to develop the idea that organized religion can be dangerous to women is Miss Torrington. Miss Torrington is a Presbyterian missionary from Boston and one of Ivy's teachers. In Ivy's community the school teachers were often traveling missionaries; therefore, the formal education of the children was somewhat colored by religion. Ivy seems accustomed to having missionary teachers: "This means that she has come from the Presbyterian Church in Boston to visit the school here, and describe the conditions" (95). Miss Torrington takes a special interest in Ivy. She recognizes Ivy's intellectual gifts and wants to take Ivy back to Boston with her so that Ivy can escape the limitations of her mountain culture. Ivy is initially very excited at the prospect of learning and traveling: "I would dearly love to go to a school such as she describes, with a library full of books. I would love to learn Latin and become a teacher" (95). At the same time, Ivy is not

completely comfortable with Miss Torrington: "But something holds me back from saying YES I WILL GO, I am not sure what" (95). Ivy has an intuitive defensiveness against Miss Torrington: "For she stands too stiff and pushes too close to you when she talks, it is hard to describe. She is not happy ether. She is strate as a poker and stars in your eyes too hard" (95). Ivy noticed Miss Torrington's aloofness: "Only Miss Torrington did not relly join in, this is normal for her though" (103). Miss Torrington uses religion to try to manipulate Ivy's feelings. She insinuates that Ivy would be committing a sin by not going to Boston with her:

I feel it is a sin, Ivy, a great sin, if we do not use our tallents that God has given us, if we do not live up to our potenshal. In some ways it may be the greatest sin of all. Miss Torrington quivered all over when she said, Sin. Then she went on, And I confess to you I feel that God has sent me here to save you Ivy, to offer you a life which will enable you to use your gifts to his glory [. . .]. I feel that you have been given to me by God as a sacred responsibility, Miss Torrington said behind me. (101)

Later, Ivy comes to realize that this would also mean being her lover. Miss Torrington's behavior, like Mr. Brown's, takes Ivy

by complete surprise, "And then, Silvaney, Miss Torrington kissed my neck! [. . .] I could not breathe, I could not think what to do, but while I was still thinking it seemed, I found myself jumping up from there" (105).

Although religious training causes Miss Torrington to hide her sexuality and to view her homosexuality as a sin, she is unable to control a lesbian impulse in the above scene. Miss Torrington experiences tremendous shame and guilt for her behavior: "Miss Torrington sank down on her bed with her mouth in a wide round O. Oh what have I done? She said, and her hands flew up to her face and she started crying" (105).

According to Rosemary Ruether's research, followers of organized religion tend to be slightly less humanitarian toward homosexuality than those who are not religious followers (109). Christianity's intolerance of sexual deviance leads to shame and guilt for those whose sexual desires are not condoned by the church. Ivy forgave Miss Torrington her passion and confusion: "And I recalled Miss Torrington's letter, how she said that there are kinds and kinds of love that sometimes we confuse them being only mortal as we are, and how she said that she would never be other than my good true friend if I would reconsider coming" (114). Ivy is able to forgive and accept Miss Torrington. Smith shows how damaging and confusing organized religion is not only for Ivy but also for Miss Torrington.

Garnie's wife Ruth is another woman who faces mistreatment in the name of religion. Through Ruth, Smith illustrates the extreme perversion that is, ironically, sometimes a part of a supposedly religious person. Garnie is revered and respected as a preacher. However, Smith shows that a respected preacher is not necessarily a good human being. Garnie is especially disrespectful to women and abusive to Ruth: "For it turned out that Garnie beats her up, and makes her do bad things" (263). Smith's description of Ruth's appearance suggests Garnie's attitude toward her:

Her nails were long and pointed, red. Her hands did not look like she had ever washed a dish in her life [. . .]. Ruthie told me later that Garnie does not want any wife of his to lift a finger except to look good, and minister to his needs" (256).

Ruth is treated more like a possession than a wife, and Smith shows, through Ruth, that such abuse can be a means of control for religious leaders. Garnie does not see any wrong in his treatment of Ruth, partially because organized religion and society have accepted that women are subordinate. Garnie has convinced Ruth that her duty to the church is to support him, and she tries to please him:

Ruthie in there drawing a line up the back of her leg with a grease pencil. She didn't have any nylons at

all! [. . .] I saw a flash of red silk underwear. She was wearing a fancy robe which Danny Ray told me later was Japanese, making Garnie at best a hypocrite and at worst a traitor. (257)

Oakley's sister Dreama is another example of a woman who is completely bound by religion. Ivy notices the difference between herself and Dreama but does not criticize Dreama's devotion: "But my own mind wandered the way it has done for years in church, and when it came time for the invitational, I enjoyed seeing everyone come forward and was not a bit surprised to see Dreama rededicating her life again" (258). Through Dreama, Smith shows the prejudices that Christians can maintain. Dreama never accepts Ivy. She sees Ivy as a fallen, ruined woman. Even in old age she refuses to speak to Ivy: "Of course we do not speak. Lord no. Not one word. Dreama Fox still thinks I am a fallen woman, I reckon" (315). This relentless, unforgiving nature is another characteristic that is surprisingly associated with many Christians.

Early in Ivy's relationship with Oakley, her husband, she is uncomfortable in the Primitive Baptist Church he belongs to. Dreama and other devout church members treat Ivy as inferior because she does not adhere to their beliefs. Through Dreama, Smith shows the narrow-mindedness that can accompany organized

religion. Ivy knows that she does not belong in the church even though she attends to please Oakley:

We went to church two times with Oakley's family and both times I was scared to death that somebody would say, There is one here that don't believe! meaning me. And I thought it might be Oakley's sister Dreama that would say it, she's real religious. (184)

Ironically, Ivy, the sinner, is the one to show compassion for Dreama. Ivy recognizes that Dreama lives by a formula that has been established by organized religion. Ivy knows that Dreama would not dare to express her individual passions:

For all of a sudden, I felt real sorry for Dreama, who is so pale and fat and hasn't got any eyebrows to speak of. Dreama will never feel as I felt this afternoon. Whether it is wrong or right she will never know it, never. She will be fat and bitter, and she will go to her grave this way. [. . .] She gets harder and harder to please. (218)

Even Dreama's appearance is reflective of her conformity: "Dreama and Edith both pull their hair straight back in tight little knots, it is their religion" (220). Dreama's community recognizes her strict religious devotion and that devotion gains her prestige: "But you know there is not a soul in this county

that will tell Dreama no. She tickles me. Even as sick as I have been, she tickles me" (315).

Smith presents Ivy as a very strong individual. In this novel we follow Ivy's spiritual development from her childhood to old age. In an early section of the novel Smith has Ivy describe one of the games of her childhood, which amounted to pretending to be an adult and experiencing situations that adults experience, including birth, death, and salvation. These activities almost always involved religion. Ivy and her siblings play out their interpretation of funerals, baptisms, and so on. As Ivy describes the situations they played out, it is clear that Smith wants to show not only the psychological effect that religion had on these children but the deeply embedded social side of organized religion. Smith recognizes the intertwined social and religious codes, as we see in this passage where Ivy describes the children's game of make-believe, "And your own people can come to and fro, they can go courting and have a baby and die or get saved or whatever you want to happen [. . .]. And iffen you want little old Garnie to play, you have got to let him preach a funeral and sing" (11).

Even as small children, Ivy and her playmates recognize the sacredness associated with the Bible. Through child's play Smith again shows the confused association of this sacredness with secular ideas. Smith captures a ritual of friendship perfectly

as she describes Ivy and her girlhood friend becoming blood-sisters: "Do you remember that day when it was raining so bad and we got Momma's needle outen her sewing box and stuck our fingers with it and mixed up our blud and swore it on the Bible we wuld tell each other iffen we ever kist a boy?" (51). In another passage, Ivy and one of her first childhood friends bond their friendship by swearing on the Bible.

Religion shapes Ivy's perceptions of herself and the world around her throughout every stage of her life. At a very young age, Ivy recognizes the paradoxes of religion. Religion's promise of peace and beauty and the contrasting preaching of literal hell fire and death are confusing to Ivy. At her father's funeral, Ivy is afraid that her father might go to the hell she has heard about, but at the same time she recognizes the gentle beauty in the world. These two extremes are presented in Ivy's description of the day of her father's burial: "It was the softest palest prettiest morning. Everything smelt so new because of the rain, it was like Genesis in the Bible" (41). However, Ivy's younger brother, Garnie, reminds Ivy of the fiery hell she has been taught about:

Where is Daddy now? he said and I said, he is dead
Garnie, he has gone to Heaven I reckon [. . .]. Garnie
looked at Daddy real hard. He aint in Heaven, Garnie
said, and something about the way he said it given me

the alloverers and I shivered just like I was froze.

(34)

Ivy is torn between what she has been taught by religion and what she feels. She battles religion as she tries to establish her own personality.

Smith also shows the confusion that is often felt when people mix the social and the sacred. For Ivy, a generous God would not allow her to live in such poor circumstances. Smith shows this confusion of material and spiritual wealth in a letter that Ivy writes to a childhood pen pal:

I know you are so rich with all your lace and those fine big cows. I know you have plenty to eat. I know I am evil and I wish evil for you too. Mister Brown told us one time that God is good, but He is not good or bad ether one, I think it is that He does not care.

(17)

Popular religious aspirations for material wealth such as streets of gold and mansions in the sky help to create the confusion that Ivy feels when she realizes her own poverty. This confusion of material and spiritual wealth is present for many people in religion. The very poor religious often bear their material poverty in this life by looking toward material and physical wealth in an eternal life.

Ivy feels evil because she wants a life in which she does not have to face hunger and poverty. Smith shows another example of a religious paradox in a gospel hymn. A song that Ivy's grandmother sings at her father's funeral reminds Ivy that religion is ever present and that it promises a better life. The impact that this confusing promise has on Ivy is obvious as she watches her grandmother: "She stood on the edge of the woods and sang 'When I can read my title clear, to mansions in the skies, I will bid farewell to every care, and wipe my weep-ing eyes. Been a long time traveling here below, to lay this body down'" (43). These lyrics also remind us of the paradox of Christianity and material possessions. Many Christians believe that material wealth can hinder one's chances of going to heaven, a belief which stems from the teachings of the Bible. At the same time, they think of heaven in material terms. Smith captures the confusion and frustration that come when individuals mix material wealth and spirituality.

We also see again that Ivy is familiar with the Bible, in spite of the fact that her parents have not taken her to church: "I can scarce recall meeting myself, and Momma is not religious ether, she has not took us to meeting since Daddy got sick and she took up figting agin the world" (34). Ivy has obviously been taught that religion comes from outward gestures such as attending church and public praying. This belief in the

necessity of religious ritual is evident as Ivy thinks about her father's afterlife. Even though Ivy tells Garnie that their father has gone to heaven, she does not really believe that he has: "But I knowed in my hart this was not so for ever since he got sick he has not gone to meeting nor prayed, this is years now" (34). The psychological turmoil that Ivy faces in this section of the novel is representative of the confusion that often comes with organized religion when believers think the ritual is the religion.

As a child, Ivy has not yet recognized the intimate and personal nature of spirituality. Smith's projection of this impersonal and ritualistic religion helps to demonstrate the extra difficulties that women have achieving sincere spirituality. In a patriarchal society it is difficult, especially for women, to gain any kind of independence, and religious independence is buried deep, beneath rigid social as well as religious structures. Not only do women have to get past the patriarchal confines of society, they then have to sort through the dogma of organized religion. This is an almost insurmountable task, and as Smith shows, one that only the strongest women even attempt.

Though the fear of hell is very real to Ivy, she experiences another type of fear that has nothing to do with hell or with death. This fear comes from the overwhelming uncertainty of

life. Smith illuminates this fear that we all face in Ivy's first letter, written to her pen friend: "I wonder very much what your chores are, and do you grow very tired, also? And are you afearred sometimes of things you cannot put a name to, as I am?" (12).

With this early image of Ivy, Smith begins to build a character with enough insight to understand and enough strength to fight the battles that women must face. Ivy spends her entire life exploring her fears and those things she can't put a name to.

Fear helps to maintain the religion in Ivy's life. Ivy's youth is shaped by the various preachers, to whom she pays special attention, and she is generally dissatisfied with what she finds. One of the first preachers that she gets to know is Mr. Brown. He is an unusual preacher to Ivy, but she prefers him to the preachers she meets after him: "Mister Brown is a forren preacher form the North but does not preach he is the husband of Mrs. Brown my teacher" (7). Ivy is accustomed to a limited scope of lessons preached by the mountain preachers and she is awestruck when Mr. Brown actually reads the Bible to his wife:

He come out on the porch where me and Molly was stringing beans for Mrs. Brown and he brung the Bible too, I thought, Oh no now he will preach, but instead he read out loud to Mrs. Brown [. . .]. Now this is

outen the Bible mind you, Rise up my love my fair one
and come away, for lo the winter is past, the rain is
over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth the time
of singing of birds is come, and the voice of the
turtle is heard in the land [. . .]. Thy lips Oh my
spouse drop as the honeycomb, honey and mild are under
thy tongue, and the smell of thy garments is like the
smell of Lebanon. He is reading all this outen the
Bible! (48)

Mr. Brown is one of the few men who encourage Ivy's
individuality. Through Mr. Brown, Ivy begins to realize that
there might be more to religion and spiritual satisfaction than
she had ever seen in church or elsewhere.

Ivy admires both Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and even in her youth
she appreciates education: "You can look in Mister Browns eyes
and tell he knows moren most folks has ever thought of" (47).
Education was not deemed necessary for women in the early 1900s,
when this novel is set. In fact, it was thought to make the
lives of women complicated and wearisome. Through Ivy, Smith
demonstrates the social and psychological resistance that women
face in a task as pure as getting an education. Ivy shares her
excitement over being the top student in her class and describes
her mother's attitude toward education in a letter to her older
sister Beulah: "I hope you will be proud of this as Momma does

not seem to care one way or the other" (95). Often women contributed to their own educational restraint by bowing to the religious notion that women are subject to the will of fathers and husbands who did not feel that their education was worthwhile.

After her father's death, Ivy and her family move to town, where they live in a boarding house. At the boarding house, Ivy comes into contact with a variety of preachers who further the rejection of organized religion started by her parents. Ivy's experiences with preachers whittle away at her confidence in organized religion. Sam Russell Sage, a famous traveling preacher, brings Ivy closer to religious fervor than she has been in her life, but then he plays a prominent role in turning Ivy away from religion:

It was scary. Sam Russell Sage is not so bad at the boardinghouse but at the big meeting he is scary [. . .]. Sam Russell Sage walks back and forth, back and forth, preaching. As he goes he gets louder and louder and catches his breath with a ah! such as, You may think that death is far away, ah, but it is right here with us tonight, ah, death waits in the dark, ah, right outside the light of this tent, ah, oh he is so hungry, ah, he is hiding behind that big willer tree by the river, ah, he is licking his chops [. . .]. And folks

on every side of us started crying and then yelling out
[. . .]. I started thinking, now will I go to Heaven,
or burn in the flames of Hell? I was getting so
scarred I could not breath [. . .]. I was terrified [. . .].
Come on, said Sam Russell Sage. Come right
on up to Jesus [. . .]. And I have to say, I almost
done it too. For I could feel the fiery hand of God
clutching me in the stomach [. . .]. The fiery hand of
God let go of my stomach, and it got to be plane old
night again [. . .]. So we got back home, but I have
not been saved yet, so I hope I will not die anytime
soon! (93-94)

Ivy has a chance to see the true nature of this famous, fancy
preacher when he stayed at the boarding house:

He is Geneva's sweetie these days whenever he comes to
town, and stays up in the room with her out of wedlock,
and drinks whisky out of bottles which he brings, and
cuts his mustache so messy that he leaves little black
hairs all over the bathroom for me or Ludie to clean
up. He does not even care what a mess he makes. (97)

Smith shows the corruption that often comes with organizations,
even religious ones. This recognition of corruption leads Ivy
closer to an individual religion. She slowly releases her fear

of the harsh patriarchal God that has been instilled in her by the organized system and preachers like Sam Russell Sage.

A couple of times in her life, Ivy tries to be saved. Once she is on the verge of responding to Sam Russell Sage's pleading to the lost at a camp meeting, but she is unable to surrender to the call: "And I will tell you something else, if Sam Russell Sage is who God has sent, then I don't know if I even want to be saved ether, in spite of the fiery hand! For I think Sam Russell Sage is awful" (97).

Smith also introduces Ivy to a number of other religious types. She sheds light on a superficial circuit preacher in another boarding house scene as the men discuss who will ask the blessing for the food: "One time we had the Methodist circuit rider and he said, Judge Brack, I have long been your admirer sir, I defer to you on this day of our Lord, and Judge Brack said, Good food, good meat, praise God, lets eat, and the circuit riders mouth dropped open" (84). Ivy is unable to find religious wisdom or guidance in most of the preachers that she meets.

Many of the religious battles that women face are not gender specific but are exaggerated because of the generally inferior treatment that women receive. However, Smith exposes the harsh standards applied specifically to women in regard to personal sexuality. Here is the heart of the social and psychological confusion that women face in a patriarchal system of organized

religion. Ivy feels damned both personally and socially because of her desires and her sexual behavior. She confides her shame in a letter to Silvaney:

I am bad, bad, rotten clear through [. . .]. When Mister Rochester kissed Jane Eyre she felt a fiery hand in her vitals, this is her stomach I reckon. Well I know what she means. I think it is a warning that you are bad. For Jane would of given in and run away with Mister Rochester if it was not for God, but I have not been saved so I do not have him to turn to. (97)

Ivy recognizes that Sam Russell Sage, and other men as well, do not face the same damaging consequences for sexual deviance that women face. Through Ivy, Smith shows a woman strong enough to weather the social rejection of her actions and come closer to spiritual peace.

Ivy also has to face her own feelings. Ivy's first sexual encounter takes place after a shocking sexual advance made by Miss Torrington, and after weeks of pleading by Lonnie Rash. Ivy's personal turmoil and confusion are obvious in her letter to Silvaney describing the events leading to her loss of virginity:

I lit out of that room as fast as I could go [. . .]. I ran up one more flight of stairs to the third floor where you know my room is, and there was Lonnie Rash [. . .]. And then because I could not think what else to

do next I let Lonnie kiss me [. . .]. I was real excited from [. . .] what Miss Torrington had done, which was awful [. . .]. I took him in my room for the first time [. . .] took off all my clothes and layed down on the bed and let him do it to me [. . .]. I looked out my window and felt so sad, and then all of a sudden I knew why, because I have lost it now, Majestic Virginia which used to be mine. And this room in Geneva Hunts boardinghouse is not my own ether, not any more, I have lost it too because of bringing Lonnie up here. I do not understand this Silvaney, but it is true. (107)

Ivy realizes that she has sacrificed herself, that some part of her has been destroyed and lost forever by her yielding, and she is saddened by this loss. Here Smith emphasizes the powerful psychological impact that sexuality has on women who have been taught, through examples like the Virgin Mary, that the sexual and the sacred are in opposition to one another. Ivy feels that she has lost this chance for sacredness forever.

Throughout the novel Smith shows the social implications of Ivy's sexual behavior and contrasts those implications with Ivy's own feelings about what is happening. We have seen the internal, personal impact of Ivy's first encounter with Lonnie, but the external, social impact is just as powerful. Society sees Ivy as

a fallen woman because of her relationship with Lonnie. Ivy is forced by society, whose rules are often derived from religion, into the role of a ruined woman. For Ivy, society's punishment is easier to bear than her personal feeling of emptiness and loss. Ivy accepts her social fate with staunch determination:

Miss Maynard has said I am ruint and can not come to help at the school any more, that I have learned all they have to teach me anyway, and I better look for another position [. . .]. The only one on my side is Ethel who says I ought not to mary Lonnie, he is too dumb! So I will stick to my guns against them all.

(109)

Smith shows us Ivy's personal strength as she sorts right and wrong and as she faces the pressures of society.

Later in the novel, Ivy accepts her sexuality and enjoys the peace and freedom of her own acceptance. Ivy describes this freedom in a letter to Silvaney:

I did not feel half bad walking the red-dog road down the mountain that next morning, in fact I felt like running and whooping it up, yelling and swinging on grapevines like we used to do up on Pilgrim Knob. Because it is a fact that if you are ruint, like I am, it frees you up somehow. (164)

She recognizes that she is somewhat outcast by society because she had a child out of wedlock, but she refuses to be repentant of her freedom. Ivy is proud of her independence in spite of the social shame as we see in the following passage: "Well, let me tell you, I used to do just as I saw fit. And I went where I pleased and done what I felt like in Majestic too, even after I got ruint" (179).

By the time Ivy is an adult, she has become disillusioned with the church, with organized religion, and with preachers. After years of internal struggles and a general rejection of religion, Ivy rethinks her spiritual attitude for a brief moment when her brother pays her a visit. Ivy's brother Garnie, a self-proclaimed man of God, treats Ivy with judgmental hatred and disgust, not love and acceptance as one might expect from a Christian. In the following passage Smith presents Garnie as a zealous preacher, speaking to a sinner:

you are a whore and an abomination, and make
no mistake about it! What you have done, oh what
you have done [. . .]. It has brought you down into
the fiery pit of hell and into damnation, for as God
has said in Proverbs 16:5, Every one that is proud
in heart is an abomination to the Lord [. . .].

Listen then Ivy, said Garnie, for this is the story of
a woman like you, a woman who thought she could take
her fill of love until the morning, and our God has
said of her in Proverbs 7:25, he has said it out
loud and clear, Let not thine heart decline to her
ways, go not astray in her paths. For she cast
down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been
slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going
down to the chamber of death. The chamber of
death Ivy, where you dwell forever along with that
sweet baby LuIda down in the cold damp earth with
her flesh rotting off of her bones while you pull
down your pants for any-. (262-63)

Garnie reminds Ivy of her sins and warns her to beg for forgiveness. Ivy is on the verge of believing that Garnie might be right, but then she turns away:

So it hit me, there on the hillside, This could be it,
after all these years. It could be God speaking out
through your fat little brother Garnie, and why not?
Stranger things have happened. But because I am so
contrary, Silvaney, another part of me said, Well, if
this is the vessel God has picked to carry his message,
then it is a mighty damn poor one! [. . .] I was
losing my will to be saved, and I knew it. I could

tell I was closing my mind [. . .]. I knew that moment I'd had when I might be saved had gone by as fast as one of those swift-moving clouds. (259-60)

Ivy recognizes the meanness in her brother and is afraid and angry. Ivy recognizes her own faults but she does not see the good in Garnie's treatment of her. She sees Garnie as the deranged fanatic he had become: "I had a full look at Garnie who was unbuckling his belt with a furious face and drooling spit and panting out loud like a dog. I reckon he was fixing to whip me with his belt [. . .]" (262).

Garnie pulls Ivy toward religion and then pushes her even further away with his mean spirit:

Garnie has come back here now and he is awful he is no brother of mine as far as I am concerned, and if he is going to heaven then I will rot in hell and be happy about it [. . .]. Back before I run off with Honey Breeding, I used to tease Oakley and sing that song that Revel taught us, I know I've been a sinner and wicked all my days but when I'm old and feeble, I'll think upon my ways. But I will not think on my ways now, and I will not go to any Heaven that has got a place in it for Garnie Rowe. (254)

Finally she is unafraid to say that she does not believe in a system that honors the likes of Sam Russell Sage and Garnie.

At the end of her life, Ivy turns back to religion in a way. This time she reads and interprets the Bible on her own. She does not bring the prejudices of the church to her reading. She just reads and enjoys the stories in the Bible: "I found Garnie's little white Bible, that he lost in the fight, and I am studying it. It is pretty good. You know how I have always loved a story" (263).

In this novel and in the other novels of this paper, Smith brings her female characters back to religion at the end. Although she points out the prejudices and the detriments that organized religion can have on the lives of women, ultimately, Smith advocates an individual religion. Ivy has finally found, ironically enough, understanding in the Bible:

I have been reading the Bible [. . .] that fancy white Bible that Garnie left up here so long ago [. . .].

The proverbs are mean-spirited which is probably why Garnie liked them! And the Song of Solomon is dirty.

It reminds me of Honey Breeding who I have not thought about in years [. . .]. But Ecclesiastes is good and makes sense. I like to read Ecclesiastes 3 [. . .].

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to

die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that
which is planted. A time to kill, and a time to
heal, a time to break down and a time to build up,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to
mourn, and a time to dance, a time to cast away
stones, and a time to gather stones together. A
time to embrace, and a time to refrain from
embracing, a time to get and a time to lose, a
time to keep, and a time to cast away a time to
rend and a time to sew, a time to keep silence and
a time to speak, a time to love and a time to
hate, a time for war, and a time for peace. (303)

This Bible passage seems to summarize Ivy's life. She understands that these lines describe the different phases of her life. As the passage suggests one should, Ivy has lived a life of balance, and she has remained true to herself.

Each of the women mentioned in this chapter is damaged in some way by the patriarchal religious system. Ivy is the strongest character in the novel and is damaged least by organized religion. This chapter pays special attention to the effects that organized religion has on the social lives of women. The social damage done to each and the consequent emotional struggles these women face are the primary dangers of organized religion Smith exposes.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVIL'S DREAM

The Devil's Dream (1992), written between Fair and Tender Ladies (1988) and Saving Grace (1995), explores the detrimental effects of religion on women. The detriments that are seen in Fair and Tender Ladies and Saving Grace are also present here. In addition, The Devil's Dream pays special attention to the role that religion can play in stifling the creative and artistic development of women. This novel, like Fair and Tender Ladies, gives hope and strength to a female character, as Smith cuts away the power that has been given to the church and to organized religion by a patriarchal society. She brings the confusing and damaging paradoxical beliefs of organized religion out into the light, and gives women a choice about their spirituality.

The three women from this novel who illustrate religion's artistic stifling of women are Kate, Rose Annie, and Katie. Smith first introduces Kate, whose marriage to a zealous Christian and her passion for the fiddle prove to be a disastrous combination. Rose Annie is confused about her sense of worth because of her early days in church. Although she enjoyed church, it left her with a feeling of guilt. Katie is the final woman we meet in this novel and the one whom Smith allows to

reach a neutral ground between her artistic spirit and her religious notions. Katie initially feels the same confusion and guilt with regard to her love for music and her responsibility to religion that the other women feel, but Smith allows her to finally reach a personal spirituality that accepts and encourages her artistic talents.

In addition to these three women, various preachers and religious representatives are introduced who help to define the limits organized religion places on the three women and to show the pollution of truth with religious ritual and myth. In this novel, as in the others, Smith develops the idea that preachers, principally male, have a strong influence on the subordination and degradation of women.

Sid Bailey is one of the first preachers whom we meet, and through him Smith establishes the harsh nature of religion presented in the novel and immediately shows the damaging effects that a religion based on fear can have on women. Sid was a frightening and hard man, able to scare people into his beliefs and into his interpretation of appropriate behavior.

Preacher Billy Looney gives a similar sermon each time he preaches. He reminds the church of the second coming of Jesus in a typical ominous way: "Jesus will come in the night, ah! And He will find you where you're hid, ah!" (40). Through Looney and Sid Bailey, Smith shows that fear is commonly used to strengthen

organized religion. This fear can prevent exploration of a personal spiritualism, which is especially damaging to women who are often less able to find spiritual fulfillment in a system that subordinates them.

Another one of these preachers was Erwin Bledsoe, a character from Katie's adolescence: "Personally I didn't like Erwin Bledsoe, because he always stood too close to me when he was talking, and touched me too much. He did this to all the girls" (216). Here, Smith lightly touches on the exploitation of power that can occur when men are protected by their affiliation with organized religion. Smith uses all of these preachers and the women in the story to support her idea that organized religion has had a responsible role in the subordination of women.

Smith also parallels the social and religious activities of the church and in this way weakens the impact the religious displays might otherwise have. Ira Keen gives a general description of these activities:

And once again, as always, hearts are somehow strengthened and lifted as all leave meeting and go outside, where the women spread dinner on the ground, everything good you can think of to eat [. . .]. The women wait on the men and children first, then they eat too [. . .] and if a horse or two gets sold behind the

church house, or a boy steals a kiss from a girl back in the trees there, or one woman tells another what to do when her baby won't take no titty, what is that? God has been served today. [. . .] And there will be other days too, for foot-washings and protracted meetings and brush-arbor meetings on the ground, where emotions will run so high that you have to get out of the way sometimes and let the Spirit work, or you might get trampled by them that is crying out and rushing forward in the hope of glory and flailing around on the floor and jerking ever which away with their eyes rolled back in their heads [. . .] for if you die shouting happy you go to Heaven for sure, and everybody knows it. (41)

Smith also hints at the insincerity often found in organized religion through a description of the prayer ritual: "People pride themselves on how long and how loud they can pray" (40). Attending this harsh and ritualistic service makes the members of the church feel cleansed. They are relieved of their guilt, shame, and other burdens for a while because they have met their ritualistic religious duty.

Another passage notes the mood of the meetings held at a church in Cana. This church was not quite as harsh as Sid Bailey's church but supported segregation of the women in church:

"Then they throw their cigarettes down on the ground and spit out their chaws and file in too, men to the right, women to the left. They sit on hard plank benches. Meeting is not supposed to be comfortable" (39). The harsh attitude of the church is reflected in the building where the meetings are held: "Inside, the Pisgah church house is as plain as it is outside [. . .]. Christ don't have no truck with the things of this world" (39).

The first female character whom Smith introduces is Kate Malone. Smith uses Kate to show the power that patriarchal organized religion can have, particularly in the family. At the beginning of the novel, Kate Malone is a happy and carefree newlywed. She marries Moses Bailey when she is just a child. A neighbor, Ira Keen, even mistakes her for a girl and not the woman of the house when he pays his welcoming visit.

Kate and Moses are from very different backgrounds. Kate's family is not considered the most righteous. Consequently, Moses does not want Kate and the children to associate with her family. The Malones are known for their love of music, fun, and frolic. Ira describes Kate's family in the following passage: "Even though the Malones are widely known as backsliders, they all attend the Old Pisgah Primitive Baptist Church set back on the ridge toward Cana" (39).

Moses is the son of Sid Bailey, one of the strictest Christians in the land, with no tolerance for fun of any kind.

Ira describes Sid's religious zeal: "I thought Sid Bailey was God Hissself then, and fer aught I know, he might of been [. . .]. Sid Bailey was a hard man, and hit was a hard doctrine he preached" (18).

Smith shows how women in religious households are often subjected to the will of their husbands, regardless of the husband's ideas. Even though Moses will not settle down and provide a living for his new family, his behavior is acceptable because he is seeking a religious sign. Daly attacks society's acceptance of this skewed power structure with a marriage: "Within this context a mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God 'himself'" (13). Moses's behavior is described by Ira:

But most times he was off at a preaching someplace, or traipsing the woods alone. See, Moses wanted to make a preacher the worst in the world, just like his daddy had done. But God wouldn't give him no sign. So Moses, he kept on a-looking fer one. (22)

Consequently, Kate is left with the responsibility of raising three children and keeping house. She often has to rely on the kindness of her neighbors just to have food for herself and her babies. By the time Kate is twenty, she has already began to wither and wear out from work and children. Smith shows through Kate's experience, how religion can cause society to

accept the controlling and subordination that men inflict upon women.

Moses limits Kate's visits to her family, saying that the devil walked in her father's house because of the fiddle playing that takes place there. Moses's beliefs about fiddle music destroy Kate's freedom of artistic expression and isolate Kate from her family's love. Kate sacrifices her love of the fiddle, her artistic talent, and to some extent her family, to satisfy Moses's religious notions. Kate only plays the fiddle when Moses is not around, but this secret playing leaves Kate feeling anxious and guilty for disobeying her husband's wishes. Moses threatens his children if they are ever caught playing the devil's instrument:

"Now you hark me," Moses said, his voice deep and terrible. "The fiddle is a instrument of the Devil, and iffen you ever take it up you will have to leave home. Fer you won't be my boy no more, you'll be the Devil's boy." And then he put both hands on Jeremiah's head and prayed on him. (27)

Moses believed that fiddle music was the voice of the Devil laughing.

Kate's father, Pink, had begun teaching his grandson Jeremiah to play the fiddle when Kate was visiting her home during her mother's illness. Jeremiah loves fiddling as much as

his mother does and is fast becoming a good fiddler. Pink wants his grandchildren to enjoy music and explore their talent. Ironically, Pink, a man who is not considered the most righteous and is widely known for backsliding, argues his case to Kate through a biblical reference even though she explained that Moses was against fiddling: "hit's a sin to put your talent under a bushel" (27). Through Pink, Smith presents the idea that biblical interpretation can be very subjective. She reminds us that this subjectivity is often not recognized, especially by fundamental faiths.

Kate loves fiddling so much that she sneaks a fiddle home and hides it so that she and her children can enjoy music while Moses is away. On his return home from one of his trips, Moses catches his wife and children singing and playing the fiddle that Kate has kept hidden. Ira's mother tells Kate's story of what happened:

Fer what Moses done was awful. He come busting outen them woods like God Hissself, a hollering, snatched that fiddle and broke it over the front porch rail, then beat all of them, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Mary and Kate, too, until the children run off in the woods to get away form him. (29)

Kate stayed with Moses and supported him in spite of the fact that he beat her and caused Jeremiah's death. Moses had

beaten her so badly that, "One side of Kate's pretty face was black and blue, and her eye was swole shut [. . .]. Kate never left his side, [. . .] it appeared that Kate loved Moses more than ever, despite of what he done" (29).

When Jeremiah ran to escape being beaten by his father, he headed for the safe haven of Pink's house. Jeremiah fell from a cliff and was killed as he ran. After Jeremiah's death, Kate's emotional state deteriorates largely because of the irrational religious behavior of her spouse. Kate is unable to see his faults and is convinced that she is to blame for her son's death. She believes that Jeremiah's death is her punishment for disobeying her husband and for playing the devil's instrument. Kate does not recognize that Moses's threats and crazed behavior are actually responsible for their son's death.

After Jeremiah's death, Moses leaves Kate again to go on a praying walkabout. Within a short time of his return, Moses dies. Kate feels additional guilt after Moses's death. She believes that she is to blame for her son's death and that the heartbreak from his death has killed Moses. Kate is completely desperate and goes crazy from all her loss and from her own guilt. Her family takes Zeke and Mary, and a short time later Kate herself dies. Thus, Smith uses Kate as an extreme example of the creative and emotional stifling that religion can inflict on women both directly and indirectly.

Rose Annie is another character in The Devil's Dream whose artistic spirit is tortured. Rose Annie recalls her religious beginnings, and unlike some of the stronger female characters, she is able to feel affectionate toward her childhood church. She describes her early religious experiences in a positive light: "As a child I was pretty religious--well, we all were, or we were supposed to be, Daddy saw to it that we went to church every time they cracked the door, and I was baptized when I was twelve" (143). When she talks about her early musical experiences in the church she still speaks with a fondness, "We had to stick to the old tunes there, and I must say, I do love them. Nothing else sounds quite like church to me" (144). In this passage we get the sense that Rose Annie equates real religion with a particular style of worship rather than an emotional experience.

Rose Annie is more like her great-grandmother, Kate Malone, than like her cousin Katie. She is unable to find peace between her life and her religion. Rose Annie, like Kate, loses her mind in the end. Rose Annie knows that she is losing herself, but she does not have the strength to control her life: "It is like a black cloud comes up out of noplac and smothers me down to the ground" (129). Through Rose Annie and Kate, Smith shows that patriarchal organized religion can destroy women who do not have

the strength and independence to create an individual form of worship.

Rose Annie feels slightly neglected by God later in her life as we see reflected in the following selection:

I was baptized when I was twelve--but after me and Johnny got so thick, I lost my religion, for a fact [. . .]. And although I have asked God for forgiveness since, and I have prayed over it, and I take my own children to church, I don't have any real feeling I'm getting through to Him. I have not had any personal response, I mean. (143)

Smith shows other women destroyed by the harshness of patriarchal religion toward women. Nonnie's mother, Effie, suffers because of her husband's skewed religious ideas. She knows that she is not well, but she ignores her pain and suffering because her husband claims that whatever happens is the Lord's will. She dies as a result. Her daughter describes what happened and the role religion played:

I had heerd her crying at night and saying, "No, Claude," and "They is something the matter," and such as that. He said, "It is God's will Effie," which is just like him, he bowed always to the will of God. And Mamma bowed always to Daddy's will, which is how the Bible says it should be. (49)

Again, female marital subordination by religious beliefs damages a woman.

We see many dangerous divisions and integrations of the social and religious. One damaging division is between religion and education. A passage by Nonnie's sister illuminates this: "I recall one time when our preacher, Mister Cisco Estep, was questioning Daddy about Nonnie's schooling and what did Daddy mean by it, for the Bible itself says that too many books is a sin" (55). Many preachers warn against empiricism and encourage faith and grace instead.

As opposed to Kate, Rose Annie, and the other women mentioned, Katie Cocker is the strongest female in The Devil's Dream. She questions the values of her family's religion from an early age. Katie is the main character whom Smith uses to show how detrimental religion can be to one's artistic and creative side.

Katie's mother is the principal agent of her being stifled. In the following passage we see an example of this repression:

Mamma had already said flat-out that there was no way she was going to ever consent to me trying to be a singer, which was what I really wanted to do. They is enough singers in this family already, Mamma had said absolutely. Too many to please God, she said, for she was convinced that most singing was a sin. (211)

Katie rebels against her mother's rigid religion as she tries to find a system of belief that she can live with and be supported by.

Katie, like many other Smith women, is confused about her spiritual worth. She faces a conflict between her natural instinct and the teachings of organized religion. Katie's confusion causes her to question the use of her artistic talents. In the following passage we see how religion brings conflict into many areas of her life:

I wanted to be good, I wanted to be bad, I wanted to get a husband, I wanted to sing my heart out. I loved mamma but I hated her, too, hated her whiny voice and lack of gumption, the way she'd make you say the blessing over everything, even a piece of pie and a glass of milk. (214)

When Katie looks to her mother for guidance, she recognizes that her mother's decisions are based on a system of religion that stifles and subordinates women. Katie realizes that her mother relies on religion for social structure as much as for spiritual guidance. Her mother is unable to face the social challenges that women encounter and resorts to the standards of patriarchal organized religion. At one point Katie almost believes that her mother is going to offer advice from her heart, but her mother quickly withdraws from true feeling and resorts to

the security of religious clichés: "But then she had to say, I just pray that God is looking over your shoulder as you make this decision, honey, and I could hear Mr. Erwin Bledsoe, our preacher, in the tone of her voice" (216).

Katie's questioning goes beyond her mother's blind and rigid belief. Katie searches for meaning and is unable to accept a religion that keeps women in subordination throughout their lives. Katie struggles to find a path of righteousness that was not impossible to follow. In her search, she has to overcome the teachings of her mother. Katie is aware of her mother's beliefs, but she is also aware of her mother's consequent lifestyle.

Katie recognizes the subordination of her mother to her father. She sees her mother bear the weight of her father's alcoholism without taking any action except prayer. To Katie, prayer is not a real means of action or change. She sees her mother's acceptance of her situation as a weak and senseless unwillingness to face a difficult situation. Katie knows that others look on her mother with sympathy and pity and, consequently, deem her a good woman, but Katie does not see subjecting oneself to emotional abuse and accepting a subordinate status as a positive thing, even if it earns the title of a good woman. In the following passage, she questions her rebellion and wonders what implications her rebellion has on her religious being:

Maybe I knew, in some part of my mind, that this was wrong-- I can't say for sure if I knew it or not, though. I can't say for sure if it was wrong or not, either. I was not real sure I wanted to be a good woman, anyway, as I said. Look where it had gotten Mamma! (226)

When Katie's daughter becomes ill with polio, Katie does not want to believe that the illness is her fault, but she questions her behavior because of it. Katie knows that she is living a sinful life by her mother's standards and by the standards of the organized church. Katie struggles internally with her decision to follow her dreams at the risk of losing her chance for salvation. When her daughter becomes sick, Katie's questioning and guilt take a toll on her. She does not rationally believe that she is to blame. But all of her patriarchal religious teachings are lurking in the back of her mind, and she half believes that God is punishing her.

Katie's mother believes that Katie's sinful behavior has caused her granddaughter's illness. Again we see Katie's mother as a puppet of organized religion and of the preacher at her church. Her mother does not have the personal strength to support her daughter; instead, she turns against her in favor of the patriarchal church. Katie is hurt by what she feels is her mother's betrayal, as we see in this passage: "She announced that

she had talked it over with Mr. Bledsoe her preacher, and that in his opinion--and hers, she was real clear about this--Annie May's polio was a direct judgment on me from God for what I'd done" (239).

Katie also feels neglected by her mother. Many times when she needs her mother's support and encouragement, her mother is judgmental and harsh. Katie longs for the warmth, caring, and understanding that is often buried beneath the harsh and unforgiving attitude of the patriarchal church toward women. In the following passage Katie misses what her mother never gave her:

[T]he black woman reached over and hugged me, squeezing me into her huge soft bosom like I was a little baby. My own mamma had never hugged me at all, you know, and here I was, over forty years old before I realized how needy I was. (296)

Katie questions her own desire for independence and her desire to follow her artistic dream. However, in some ways her mother's stifling behavior seems to drive Katie further toward independence. Katie feels a certain responsibility to her mother, who has looked after her, and a conflicting responsibility to herself, as we see in the following passage: "[Y]ou have to go forth in the world bowed down by all your parents' hopes and dreams as well as your own" (216). In another

passage we see Katie coming to terms with her mother's weakness and her own strength: "I could see Mamma praying on the porch as we pulled into the road, and it made me mad as fire. I knew for sure that I would never come back home to live again" (240).

Later in her life Katie begins to recognize people's need for something to believe in. Smith notes that many people want to associate themselves with celebrities in the same way that religious worshipers want to be associated with religion. She recognizes that the sense of belonging, the connection, that people gain from attending concerts and following the lives of stars is similar to the feeling of belonging that people gain when they join in religious worship. Belonging to an established group gives order, value, and confidence to the lives of the members. This need for membership and belonging helps to maintain organized religion. In this passage Katie realizes that famous artists are worshipped in a way that is similar to religious worship. This realization comes to Katie as she waits backstage:

It is not the stars. It's the fans. Standing backstage at the Ryman was when I really realized this, watching them get up and slip forward as their favorites came on, walking one at a time right up to the footlights [. . .]. It's exactly like people going

up for Communion in a big Catholic church, if you ask me [. . .]. (273)

After a series of trials and hardships, through which Katie has either rejected God or been indifferent about religion, she finally discovers a pattern of belief that allows her to be independent and artistically creative without feeling guilty and afraid. Even though Katie outwardly rejects religion, she has many patriarchal religious notions so deeply ingrained in her that she has never been able to be independent, nor has she ever escaped feeling slightly helpless and afraid. Katie half believes that Annie May's polio is God's punishment for her sins and that God does not tolerate or love those who are sinful and disobedient, as Katie perceives herself as being.

Katie finally realizes that, like her mother, she has relied on the advice and strength of others, a realization that helps to strengthen her. When Katie meets Billy Jack, a very unorthodox preacher, she begins her trek toward independence, strength, and peace. Katie finally recognizes God as a loving support figure instead of a harsh and judgmental dictator, but not at first. Billy Jack's teaching helps Katie to escape the confines of traditional organized religious beliefs. He presents God as a loving caretaker. This notion had been lost to Katie for so long that she rejects it at first, as we see here:

"We are all children of God," he said, "and God loves

us every one." Naturally this made me furious. "If that's true, how come he treats us so bad?" [. . .] "How come He would make me suffer like this?" "He doesn't like to see you suffer, Katie," [. . .]. "Your pain is His holy pain, and He will bear it all for you. He will take it all away from you right now if you will let Him." "Bullshit," I said. (294-295)

Katie's unwillingness to accept Billy Jack also comes partly from her previous negative experiences with preachers, including the preacher who blamed her for her baby's illness, and another preacher who used his position and power to get close to young girls. Katie remembers the preacher of her past when she first meets Billy Jack: "All the preachers I had ever seen before were old, and serious as death, and death was mostly what they talked about" (297).

Katie finds God, but it is not the same God that her mother had worshipped and tried to force on Katie. Katie is finally able to synthesize her artistic and human spirit with her religious spirit. This resolution brings Katie many realizations and ultimately peace:

Now I can understand that I was starving for God's love, that I had been denying that part of myself ever since I was a child, ever since I'd been cut off somehow from the love of God at the church on Chicken

Rise. I'd cut myself off, to be exact--out of arrogance, out of pride, out of not wanting to be like my mamma. (295-296)

The unconditional love that Katie finds in God near the end of the book allows her to be a woman, to be an artist, to be independent, and never to have to feel guilty for being who she is. Katie finally finds peace as she states here:

God is Love, God loves you, no matter how unworthy you are, no matter what you've done, and all you have to do is let Him into your heart [. . .]. Everything we ever do in our lives has got something to do with the search for love. (297)

Smith develops through Katie a religion untarnished by social pressure and by organized ritualistic worship. When Katie accepts God, her God, she realizes that the God she was taught about in Chicken Rise Church was someone else's God, a harsh and patriarchal God forged to confine thought and creativity particularly in the women of the church and of the society. Katie's religious spirit is finally nurtured, as we see in this passage:

Then I felt God come into me through the mouth, like a long cool drink of water [. . .]. God is an endless source of pure energy for me. What my God says to me is Yes! Yes! instead of No! No! which

is all God ever said to anybody up on Chicken Rise, if you ask me! God wants us to express His love in our lives through using our creative gifts to the fullest, He wants us to use this life which He has given us. He wants us to be artists for Him. (298)

Katie is finally able to escape the traditional role that society has established for women, and she releases the harsh, morbid, patriarchal image of God that had been taught to her in her childhood. Through God she finds independence, and through her independence she finds God. Katie finally understands that religion is personal, not a source of shame and guilt, but a source of peace and strength: "If it is possible for God to speak to Paul on the road to Damascus, it is possible for Him to speak to me in the voice of a cracker-jack lesbian accountant" (301).

This chapter explores the harm done to women's artistic development both directly and indirectly by organized religion as well as the psychological damage that results. Smith's strongest character in this novel is finally able to simultaneously pursue her career and her religious beliefs after many years of feeling guilty for rejecting organized religion.

CHAPTER 4

SAVING GRACE

In Saving Grace, Lee Smith forces the reader to recognize the degraded and subordinate role that women play in an organized system of religion. This novel could come only after two other novels, Fair and Tender Ladies and The Devil's Dream, that gradually strengthened the leading women and questioned the practices of organized religion. Here again, female subordination opens the door for the fear, guilt, shame, and uncertainty that women face because of organized religion. The psychological damage done to Grace in this novel is much more serious than the damage done to Ivy and Katie, the other two characters who are able to survive the organized religious structure and develop a personal spirituality.

Religion is a much larger part of Grace's life than it is for Ivy and Katie. In this novel, Smith sinks her protagonist, Grace, deep into the Holiness-Pentecostal faith, one of the most fervent and passionately expressive Christian faiths. Troy Abell's book discusses the expressive style of the Holiness-Pentecostal faith:

A second important assumption among Holiness-Pentecostals is that outward action (saying "amen,"

clapping hands, stomping feet, running the aisles, dancing in the spirit, shouting, jerking, speaking in tongues) is a manifestation of God's presence in a person's life. Worship services tend to be evaluated on the basis of the amount of outward action.

(124)

This deep religious saturation puts Grace in a more seriously subordinated role than the other women, and it leaves her much more damaged. Grace is unable to make sense of the religious foundation that her life has been built on and shaped by and at the same time unable to abandon it:

None of this made sense to me, and I could not detect God's purpose anywhere. I began to suspect that there was no purpose at all, in fact, but every time I thought this, a great bottomless empty feeling would rush through me, scaring me to death. (202)

The expression "saving grace" refers to the Divine mercy of God. Grace is the quality that can save one's soul from the eternal torture of a burning hell. According to the Holiness Pentecostal denomination of Christianity, even the most righteous person would be denied the kingdom of heaven without grace.

Through the experiences of Grace, Fannie, Evelyn, Billie Jean, and the Word sisters, Smith brings to light the religious mistreatment of women. In this novel, Smith tries to "save"

Grace from organized religion and from the abyss that results from the lack of faith.

Smith uses Fannie Flowers, Grace's mother, to show the reach of organized religion's detrimental effects. Fannie is a dancing girl when she is caught up in the religious web of Grace's father: "I knew my mama loved him too, more than she loved anybody- more than me, more than Jesus even" (68). Since their meeting, she has followed and supported Virgil: "She went with him to meeting, and read the Bible out for him to preach" (24). Fannie knows of his extramarital affairs, but she stays and supports him anyway: "Mama loved Jesus too, but I think she loved Daddy even more" (24). Finally, Fannie begins to wear down with Virgil's sexual escapades:

And you dare to call yourself a man of God, a preacher, you dare to tell everybody else how to behave! Well, this is the last un. The last un! And let me tell you one thing, sir, if you think I am going to keep my mouth shut this time, you've got another think coming! (87)

Smith shows that Fannie, like many religious women in her position, is afraid of what might happen to her without her husband. Fannie becomes more and more isolated as her husband pursues his religious aims as well as sexual escapades. Smith

shows, through Grace's eyes, the change that comes over Fannie when she realizes the state of her marriage:

I ran down the hill as fast as my legs would carry me, looking all around at the sunny day, trying to fill up my eyes with the bright blooming flowers and new green trees, trying to push that horrible picture of Mama, the witch like stranger by the stove, out of my head forever. For my sweet loving mama was gone by then, and gone for good.

(88)

Fannie realizes that when she is unable to support Virgil he will leave her as he has left his previous wives: "All of a sudden I knew that Daddy would leave her if she didn't get better, and that this would kill her, as it had killed Lamar's mother" (93).

In her confused desperation, Fannie becomes involved with Lamar, Virgil's son from a previous marriage, but she turns out to be less able to handle the guilt of a sexual affair than Virgil. For her it is a disastrous experience of guilt and shame. Fannie ultimately kills herself because of the guilt and shame she feels over her affair with Lamar. Fannie is destroyed, not by Virgil's affair, but by her own. Grace knows that Fannie's suicide is a result of the guilt she felt after giving in to Lamar's seductions:

All I knew was that Mama's death was his doing, and I knew that absolutely, that she had been lonely and desperate and that he had come to her then, had lain with her as he had lain with me, and that she could not stand it, and now she was dead. (113)

Smith shows, through a despicable character like Lamar, how desperate and lonely women often are even inside a marriage or a large family when they are unable to fulfill the requirements set for them particularly by organized religion.

The complications that women face in marital relationships are often due to religion's inability to accept women as simultaneously sexual and sacred:

[L]oss of the idealized relationship occurs when the woman realizes that the relationship she has hoped for is not attainable with her current partner.

[. . .] The image of married women presented in the mass media and the culture, (particularly in the religious community), the early peer pressures to become involved in a steady relationship, and the emphasis in social activities on couple participation all combine to encourage women to feel more valued as a partner than as an individual. (Horton 124)

Grace's sister, Evelyn, is another victim of organized religion's subordination of women. Evelyn is denied her beauty and independence because of religion. Evelyn is not allowed to enjoy her beauty because of her father's strict beliefs. Smith's description of Evelyn when she tries on a dress the girls found in the attic illuminates this point:

This was when I first realized that Evelyn was beautiful. Though she was only eleven at the time, she held herself erect in that dress and walked in a way I'd never seen her walk before [. . .] and then we called Mama to come and watch Evelyn [. . .]. To our surprise, Mama covered her face with her hands and started crying as if her heart would break. [. . .] "Take it off," Mama finally said to Evelyn [. . .]. "Don't you never let me see you in such as that" [. . .]. "You know what your daddy would think." (13)

Evelyn is taught that she should live for the glorification of the Lord, not of herself, even though this means a sacrifice of her own happiness: "One time Daddy caught Evelyn with a love magazine and beat her with his belt until her back was covered with welts. Daddy believed in 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' and practiced this for our own good" (11).

In spite of Evelyn's mistreatment, she follows the lead of her father. She accompanies him on his trips and sings at his

meetings. Evelyn is loyal in a way that Grace is never able to be. The discovery of one of her father's affairs finally forces Evelyn away from her father and her family.

Another of Grace's sisters, Billie Jean, is mentally destroyed by the brutality of religion. Billie Jean is able to function and understand her surroundings in a limited way until the fight over Troy Lee's illness. After this fight Billie Jean is lost in her own mind. She is a simple child who cannot understand the violent scene she witnesses in her home. She is unable to function and care for herself after this devastating episode. The fight centers around their younger brother, Troy Lee. Grace believes that God has made him ill because she had lied and said that he was ill when he was not. The fight erupts when Troy Lee is near death and Virgil refuses to allow his oldest son, Joe Allen, to get medical help for the little boy. Virgil does not believe in medical science, he depends instead on God. The fight ends with Joe Allen taking Troy Lee to the doctor and saving his life. This climactic scene pushes Billie Jean beyond her emotional capacity and she is never able to return.

Physical abuse and violence are definite elements Grace's family's religion. Violence is used to control the family when religious guilt is not enough to keep them in line.

Other elements of organized religion that Smith deals with in this novel involve the rigid and often contradictory lifestyle

of Christians. Smith presents Travis Word's sisters as very mechanical in their religious worship. Their style is often more self-righteous than righteous. Smith shows two principal detriments that organized religion has on these women.

The first detriment that Smith explores through these women is organized religion's stifling of personal freedom. Their thoughts and actions are dictated by their severe religion. These women do not allow themselves to feel or think on an individual level. Even Travis agrees that the effects of such a structured religion are sometimes harsh: "'She's a fine woman,' [. . .]. 'But good intentions can be hard on a person sometimes'" (165). These women are not able to experience personal freedom, nor do they allow themselves to enjoy life or feel pure emotion. Smith describes this rigid lifestyle and the chaos that erupts when things do not go exactly according to their schedule in this scene where Grace has bought milk without first consulting Helen: "'I know we were out of milk!' Helen said. She fished in her coat pocket and brought up a little list that had 'milk' written at the top of it" (213).

Smith also explores the danger of members of an organized religion feeling superior in their righteousness and becoming judgmental and unforgiving of others. The Word sisters make their decisions and condemn others based on the strict code of conduct established by the HI-WAY Tabernacle church. They do not

question the fairness of their judgments and behaviors. When they are angry with Grace their behavior does not resemble generous Christian behavior. Their reaction to Grace's affair is harsh and unforgiving: "'You can quit acting so nice [. . .]. 'You whore of Babylon.' 'You huzzy.' 'You little slut'" (227). They force Grace out; even though Travis continues to love her and eventually forgives her. The sisters, who are only bystanders, are never able to let go of their hatred.

Smith's principal representative character of female subordination in this novel is Grace, a young girl traveling with her family when we meet her. She seems at times to want to be saved from grace, instead of by grace. For Grace, religion brings with it fear, anger, guilt, and a whole range of negative emotions. Grace is more severely damaged psychologically by organized religion than any of the women we have seen to this point in Smith's writing. In her young life, Grace never feels appreciated or loved, and this void is largely due to a religious background that discourages relationships before God. Although Grace does not seem as at peace at the end of the novel as Ivy and Katie are, Smith shows that Grace has overcome much greater obstacles than these other two.

As a child Grace is forced into many sacrifices as her parents work for the Lord. Grace envies people who do not have to make the religious sacrifices that are required of her. The

first paragraph of Saving Grace provides a brief background and some insight into Grace's character:

My name is Florida Grace Shepherd, Florida for the stated I was born in, Grace for the grace of God. I am the eleventh child of the Reverend Virgil Shepherd, born to him and his third wife, Fannie Flowers. They say I take after her, and I am proud of this, for she was lovely as the day is long, in spirit as well as flesh. It isn't true, however. I am and always have been contentious and ornery, full of fear and doubt in a family of believers. (1)

This early admission of fear and doubt is essential in understanding the role religion plays in Grace's life.

Early in the novel we begin to see Grace's complicated situation. She resents her family's religion, but she is afraid to contradict it. Grace is ashamed both of her resentment and of her fear. She recognizes that religion is responsible for many of her and her family's hardships.

Smith shows that Grace's subordination begins with neglect, in the name of religion. Grace's childhood is spent traveling. Some nights she has to sleep in a tent in the blowing snow, and other times she awakes after a night of sleeping in a tent to find her eyes swollen completely shut from mosquito bites. Grace

is acutely aware of the negligence of her parents and what she feels must be the negligence of God. A quote from early in the book makes this clear:

Mama took good care of us, as good as she could.

This was not true of Daddy, nor of Jesus either as far as I could see [. . .]. I did not love Jesus. And I actually hated Him when He made us take up traveling in His name, living with strangers and in tents and old school buses [. . .]. I was full of resentment and raged against Him in my heart. (4)

Grace is angry about being neglected and feels guilty because of her anger. In the following passage Grace describes a time when her parents sacrificed the needs of their children as they followed their perceived religious path:

We were all hungry. We had slept in the car the night before, piled on top of each other, and breakfast had been half a loaf of white bread, hours and hours before. I'd never cry, though. I'd die first [. . .]. I ignored my empty stomach and looked up the dark column of smoke, past the tops of the dusty green trees, to a patch of deep blue sky. I wished I could just float away with the smoke, away from there, away from them all. (7)

Grace feels hopeless and desperate. She sees other children who are saved and are Christians, but they do not have to live in abandoned buses, tents, and cars. The confusion that Grace feels because of her resentment and guilt makes her believe that she is a bad person. Grace has been taught that her questioning is sinful. Even though Grace resents the time that her parents spent following the Lord's will and neglecting her and her siblings, she tries to please her parents. She does not care quite as much about pleasing Jesus.

Grace's rejection of religion begins, not because of disbelief, but because of the neglect and fear that she feels because of it. The neglect that Grace endures from her mother is especially heartbreaking because Grace recognizes that her mother is following her father more than God. Grace recognizes that she and her sisters will never have their mother's attention:

Ruth [a neighbor] would patch our clothes too, and clean the house, claiming it was the least she could do. She taught us how to sew on buttons and crochet. It was not that Mama couldn't do these things- it was just that she was so caught up in Daddy's ministry.

(23)

Grace suffers confusion as she battles the paradoxes of religion. Grace's father is instrumental in her subordination and psychological turmoil. Virgil, Grace's father, spends most

of his time away from home and does little to provide for his family. It is his belief that the Lord will provide. Grace witnesses the prejudiced nature of her father's religion and questions the necessity of this prejudice. He is prejudiced against blacks, as Grace witnesses during one of her stays in town: "'I never knowed you was staying over here among nigger lovers' [. . .]. 'I'm just as sorry about it as I can be'" (136). Her father, a revered servant of God, refuses to obey human laws, and he uses passages from the Bible to support his rejection of rules: "Daddy always said he obeyed God's laws, not man's, quoting from Acts 5:29" (16). Grace recognizes the incongruities in her father's behavior but is unable to understand their significance at first.

Grace does not enthusiastically subscribe to her father's religion, but she has seen enough evidence of spiritual presence through speaking in tongues and snake handling to know that it is a very real thing. Instead of going forward at her father's meetings, Grace watches from the back of the group, in fear of what might happen to her mother and father. Grace hates the serpent handling and even more she hates her mother's handling fire.

Grace longs for the peace that religion promises, but her attempts for peace through religion are futile and seemingly hopeless:

I felt like if I could love Jesus then I wouldn't mind anything and I would feel like a blessed child, as Ruth Duty said. But He never had sent me a sign, and right now I did not love Him [. . .]. I was fairly sure I was going to Hell, but I couldn't think what to do about it. (68)

Grace's young life is filled with fear. She is afraid of her father, afraid of God, and afraid of the devil: "I worried that the Devil might really be in me after all, growing like a baby inside of me [. . .]" (4). Grace has witnessed the treatment of people who were believed to have the devil in them and she is afraid:

I was full of resentment and raged against Him in my heart, but I knew better that to say it out loud, for then they might decide I was possessed by the Devil and try to cast him out as directed by Acts 10:38. I had seen this done, and did not want it done to me. (4)

Grace knows that her father would try to cure her of the sinful rage that she feels toward God.

Guilt, inflicted by religious teachings, is another element of the psychological damage Grace faces. Grace is guilty and afraid when her younger brother, Troy Lee, becomes ill. Grace feels that his sickness is a result of her sins. Consequently, she feels unworthy of love and begins to believe that she is

subordinate. Guilt drives Grace to help save her little brother by restraining her mother during a fight and risking physical abuse. Grace sincerely believes that the Lord has made Troy Lee sick because she has told a lie. Grace does not want her sister to tag along on a trip that she is taking to stay with a town family, so she lies and says that one of them is sick and can not come along. Grace wants to escape her family and all of its hardships, so she lies in order to have all the attention on her visit. Grace is afraid that this selfish lie is punished by her brother's illness.

Grace also feels guilty because she has a natural appreciation of beauty and nice things, even though religion has taught her that it was a sin. She recognizes her mother's beauty and her sister's, and once she is away from her father she pays attention to her own appearance. Grace is ashamed of the pride that she takes in the jumper that her friend's mother made for her. She knows that she will never be allowed to wear the jumper, but she does not want to give it up. She keeps the jumper hidden in the corn crib so that she can occasionally sneak a look at it. Grace finally destroys the jumper during one of her internal battles with guilt and shame (64).

In addition, Grace faces guilt for her sexuality from a young age when she is seduced into an incestuous relationship with her half brother, Lamar. Lamar pays more attention to Grace

than anyone ever had in her life. She is emotionally needy and not an unwilling sexual partner:

Suddenly he was there behind me, his hands all over me, his hot breath on my neck. He had my new white blouse half off in a flash [. . .]. He knew exactly what to do and when to stop. [. . .] That first day, he even helped me tuck my new blouse back in my new skirt.

(80)

Even though Grace is enticed by Lamar, she is ashamed and guilty for her behavior: "I felt so full of shame I wished I could die" (81). Grace is so desperate for a better life that she hopes Lamar will be her savior. Lamar provides Grace with hope for escape: "Someplace back in my mind I had started thinking that Lamar was going to take me away with him sometime, if I could just hang on long enough" (89).

When Grace realizes that she has been used by Lamar, and that she has encouraged him, she is nearly destroyed by her shame. Again Grace blames herself for the disasters that come to her family following her sin. The following passage reveals her desperation and her guilt:

I felt dirty. Nasty. I felt like anybody could just look at me, even there in the store, and see what I was, and know what I had done with Lamar. For I did it first. I started it all. Mama would

still be alive today if it wasn't for me. The worst thing was, I couldn't figure out what to do about it now. I knew that I had sinned and that I had been a slave to sin. I knew that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, as in Romans 6:23. (115)

Grace is unable to forgive herself for her perceived sin. Because she feels guilty and ashamed of her behavior, she allows herself to be treated without respect or appreciation. She believes that her ill treatment is deserved, and she wants to bear it if it will expunge her guilt. Grace is not only guilty for her own sexual misconduct, but she also feels partially responsible for her mother's death. Grace feels that her own sins are being punished by her mother's suicide.

At the time of her mother's suicide, Grace speaks in tongues in her sleep. This religious experience leaves Grace feeling afraid, abnormal, and even further separated from those around her. She does not remember what she has said, and she is angry for having the experience. Grace longs for a "normal" life free of all religious uncertainty and fear:

I did not want those people to look at me funny. I did not want to be visited by Jesus in the night. I did not want to be visited by Jesus at all, and was terrified that He might return. "Don't come

back," I whispered to Him that morning in the washroom of the Jesus Name Church. "Just leave me alone," I prayed, for I was scared to death.

(107)

Speaking in tongues is one of the signs followed by the Holiness-Pentecostal faith. These signs also include serpent-handling, drinking poison, and other acts of faith. According to Burton, sign followers believe that God gives them the power to do these things:

Sign followers believe that at some point they are baptized by the Holy Ghost. They trace this baptism to the Day of the Pentecost [. . .] where the followers of Jesus "were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance". (6)

After her mother's death and after Lamar left, Grace is overwhelmed by her guilt and by loneliness, so she turns to God: "The big problem was that God wouldn't have anything to do with me now, though I tried and tried to pray [. . .]. He had turned away his face so I couldn't think of what to do next" (115). Grace is unable to find any peace in her father's harsh, threatening, judgmental, and impersonal religion.

Her father's Christianity assigns such strict and impossible roles to women that failure is inevitable. Grace recognizes at

an early age the limits of her power as a woman: "So I agreed with Carlton Duty and the others--but in secret, for the Holiness girl or woman does not have a voice in such as that. A woman can handle and she can preach, but she can't decide things" (99). Grace recognizes that women are restricted by the Holiness doctrine and by society, not by God.

On a few occasions when Grace is older, she has the chance to escape her father, but she chooses to follow him instead. Grace cannot bear to abandon her father because of her own guilt: "I had to go to him then, I had to go with him, though my heart sank like a stone in my chest. I walked out from behind the counter" (116). Grace recognizes that her father is using her, but she bears the abuse out of guilt:

He took me along because he needed me to read the Bible out for him to preach, the way Mama used to do [. . .]. I was an instrument of Daddy, the way he was an instrument of God. I understood this, and bore it without complaint. I felt like it was my due some way, my duty. (121)

Even after Grace sacrifices her own chance for happiness to go with her father, he remains neglectful: "He never said thank you. He took my help for granted, though others remarked to him in my presence how lucky he was to have such a nice big girl" (138). Grace is still hurt by her father's neglect:

Daddy's attitude hurt my feelings, even though I knew he had more important things on his mind such as saving souls [. . .]. I told myself that Daddy was giving me as much attention as he could, as much as I deserved. I knew I did not deserve much due to what I had done. I was sure everything was my fault. (138)

Grace obediently follows her father's rules: "I did not want to displease Daddy, for he was a real power in those days, and I could not have gone against him" (137). His religion controls her style of dress and her personality. She accepts her subordinate role.

In Christianity, men have assigned themselves a dominant role, and have maintained their dominance, in part, through Biblical support, basing this hierarchy on Biblical stories including the story of creation. However, the Bible also cautions against dominant control. According to Horton, a biblical passage, Mark 10:42-43, cites an example of how Jesus confronted the presuppositions of male power and dominance:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever

wishes to be first among you shall be slave of
all. (223)

Colossians 3:18-19 also supports the equal role of women in the home: "Wives, adapt yourselves to your husbands, that your marriage may be a Christian unity. Husbands, be sure to give your wives much love and sympathy; don't let bitterness or resentment spoil your marriage" (223). Unfortunately these passages are often misapplied or ignored by organized religious structures.

Grace is rescued by Travis Word when her father abandons her. Grace describes her life at the time she met Travis Word, who becomes her husband: "I was at the end of my rope. I was damned, abandoned, and wore-out" (165). Smith shows Grace further subordinated in marriage, where she loses touch with her husband as he spends more and more time praying and working for the Lord and less time with her.

In her married life Grace has a variety of negative experiences. To get Travis Word's attention and to force him to marry her, she seduces him. Grace realizes that when Travis sees her naked breast and she leads his touch to it that he will feel that it is his responsibility to marry her. Later, she is made to feel guilt and rejection for her sexual behavior as his wife. Travis feels that sex is a sin and this leaves Grace feeling

guilty as well as isolated from her husband. On their wedding night Grace sees the extreme nature of Travis's views on sex:

At that the most awful change came over Travis Word. His very face turned gray and his eyes rolled back in his head, and he sat straight up [. . .]. Before I knew it he was down on his knees by the bed. [. . .] and there on my knees too, both of us buck naked, as he quoted from Romans about our sinful passions working in our members to bear fruit for death. He was attempting to purify us [. . .]. (188)

Grace's marriage leaves her feeling that she is impure. Because she has sexual desires and expresses them, she is made to feel dirty and guilty. Long before she is tangled up in an affair with Randy Newhouse, Grace realizes that she will not be able to maintain her role as Preacher Travis Word's wife: "For a long time Travis's attitude toward bodily love did not seem too important, but then there came a time when it did, when I reckon my true nature came out too" (197).

Travis not only withholds physical love from Grace, he also withholds attention and emotional support: "Travis was growing farther away from me than ever. Either he was lying on the bed or he was working like a dog, and either way, there was no room for me in his life" (202). Grace recognizes herself as a person, "searching for hard ground in a world of shifting sands" (164).

Grace is unable to live her life in the manner that her husband thinks she should. However, she is sure that she and Randy are damned for their affair: "Don't you know that what we done is a mortal sin, and we are going to burn in Hell for it?" (232). Grace can not stand to live the religious life that is presented by her father nor the one presented by Travis Word, but she is so bound by the religious teachings that she cannot stand to live her life in the way she is drawn by nature.

Grace cannot accept religion, but it is so deeply ingrained in her that she cannot reject it either. In this novel, Smith has Grace tackle much deeper religious issues than the women in the previous novels. Although at times it seems as if Grace will not be able to surmount the unbelievable hardships that she faces, she does survive. Neither Ivy nor Katie experience such traumatic events. Grace's transient youth, including living in tents and cars, is much more damaging than either Ivy's or Katie's. In addition, Grace witnesses frightening displays of ecstatic faith by her parents, such as handling of serpents and fire; she is often left to take care of her younger siblings when she is only a child herself; she is seduced into an incestuous relationship by a half brother; she finds her mother's body after her mother's suicide, for which Grace feels she is to blame; she is locked in a trailer and abandoned by her father; she is neglected and made to feel sinful by her zealously religious

husband; and she is betrayed by the man she sacrificed her husband and children to be with. Even though Grace has not attained the same personal spiritual peace and strength that Ivy and Katie find, she has survived, and she seems ready to begin the process of healing and moving toward that peace.

After all of her experiences, Grace is finally at a point where she can make conscious decisions about her life. She does not have her father to tell her what to do nor does she have Travis Word's sorrowful lead to follow. She turns instead to a more personal religion.

Grace begins to have some confidence in the way of life that she believes is righteous and bearable: "I am a believer in the Word, and I am not going to flinch from telling it [. . .] for I've got to find out who I am and what has happened to me, so that I can understand what is happening to me now, and what is going to happen to me next" (4).

Again in this novel, Smith gives a female character strength through a personal faith and spirituality. Grace still needs the structure of church in her life because the church has been the foundation of her development. Even though she does not discard the church, she is able to gain strength and peace from the knowledge that she can exist as a woman and a Christian simultaneously. Even though Grace has not yet achieved the level of independence that we see in Ivy and Katie, she has traveled

further and along a much more treacherous path than these other two women.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Lee Smith describes her writing as a lifelong search for belief. Her novels reveal that religion has played a significant role in that search. Smith has explored, progressively, in the three novels of this study, the forces that shape women.

Although community and family are important in the development of the women in Smith's novels, Smith is aware and continually demonstrating that both these institutions have been drastically shaped by organized religion. Smith also pays special attention the male dominant hierarchy, referred to as a patriarchy in this study, that generally exists in each of systems that shape women. Daly describes the extensive reach of the patriarchal religious system: "The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting" (13). Daly's work shows that organized religion is important not only for its direct impact on the lives of women but for the indirect effect it has through community and family.

Smith's religious inquisitiveness deepens as her career progresses. In Fair and Tender Ladies, published in 1988, she develops a very strong and independent female character, Ivy Rowe. Ivy faces several social challenges, primarily because of

her unrelenting desire for independence and for the free expression of her sexuality. The strongest opposition that Ivy faces in her quest for independence and sexual freedom comes from her community, which is largely driven by organized religion. The community's reaction to Ivy's behavior does leave her with some guilt, but most of the damage done to Ivy by organized religion is external. Ivy tries throughout her life to gain religious peace. She is only able to find that peace when she rejects organized religion. Because religion's detrimental effects on Ivy are primarily external, she is able to survive and develop independence as well as a personal spirituality.

Katie Cocker, from The Devil's Dream, is another strong Smith female. Organized religion has a slightly stronger hold on Katie than on Ivy. Katie not only lives in a community structured by organized religion, her family is also religious. Katie's mother, one of Katie's strongest influences, is extremely devoted to the church and she expects Katie to be as well. Katie feels that she has to choose between her artistic talent and organized religion. She does not feel that she can pursue them simultaneously. Katie feels that her artistic and creative expression is in conflict with organized religion. Early in her career, Katie often feels guilty and sinful for choosing her talent over the church. Katie's religious battles are much more internal than Ivy's and significantly tougher. Katie's community

pays more attention to her because she is a member; consequently, she feels a much stronger sense of guilt and shame when she is unable to live by the rules established by organized religion. However, by the end of the novel, Katie has found inner strength and personal spirituality.

Saving Grace, the last novel of this study, explores the dangers of organized religion in a much more intensive manner than the earlier novels. In this novel Smith plumbs the depths of a fervent snake-handling family and explores the dangers of religion for a female reared in this environment. Grace is subjected to a lifetime of mistreatment, neglect, fear, shame, and guilt that is based on her father's Holiness faith. Her family, her community, and her religion seem to all be one overwhelming entity. Although, at the end of the novel Grace does not seem as strong or as settled as Ivy and Katie, she has progressed the most considering where she began her battle.

Lee Smith's work gives insight into many of the forces that shape the lives of women. In her novels, she questions the values of organized religion and considers the social, psychological, artistic, and even physical harm that women can face because of the standards set by a religious system. Smith shows the impact that organized religion has on the family and society, and consequently on the individual.

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